DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 226 384 CS 504 104

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TITLE Using Undergraduate TA's in the Basic Course.
PUB DATE Feb 83
NOTE 6p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Western Speech Communication Association (Albuquerque, NM, February 19-22, 1983).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Course Content; Course Descriptions; Grading; Higher Education; *Instructional Innovation; *Speech Communication; *Speech Instruction; *Teaching Assistants; Teaching Methods; Undergraduate Students
IDENTIFIERS Arizona State University

ABSTRACT

Three innovations combine to make it possible for Arizona State University to move 1,600 students a year through a performance based communication course with no expense but the salary of a single faculty member. Apart from the obvious economic benefits, the mass lecture/small group breakdown format assures that the student will receive an academically sound introduction to the field of communication, and the course design permits a standardized public speaking experience that improves both the form and the substance of student performances. This is possible because undergraduate teaching assistants are selected on the basis of having been superior students in the course during the prior semesters; therefore, the best students are recycled back into the course as TAs. The primary disadvantage lies in the grading, since the influence of the TA upon a student's grade must be kept to a minimum, and only the course director determines the final rank-ordering of the student speeches and then assigns grades to the individual students. The three innovations that must be included in the system to make the use of undergraduate TAs practicable are (1) a contiguous lecture breakdown schedule, (2) a personalized text-syllabus-workbook publication, and (3) a "classroom apprenticeship" course to serve as a vehicle for giving the TAs academic credit as payment for their service to the course. (A sample course calendar is included.) (HTH)

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USING UNDERGRADUATE TA's IN THE BASIC COURSE

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1983 Basic Course Conference
Albuquerque, NM

ED226384

Three innovations combine to make it possible for Arizona State University to move 1600 students a year through a performance-based hybrid course with no expense but the salary of a single faculty member. In fact, even the cost of instruction (tests, handouts, activity guides, and portable cassette tape recorders) are sustained by the student. Before the mechanics of the system are developed, however, it is useful to comment upon the advantages and disadvantages that have accrued from the adoption of this format.

Apart from the obvious economic benefits, several other advantages can be claimed. Most importantly, the mass lecture/small group breakdown format assures that the student will receive an academically sound introduction to the field of communication. Consequently, the course has become sufficiently popular with students to enable a doubling of enrollment during the two years it has been in operation. At the same time, however, we can increase rigor (the course GPA has moved from an average grade of B--3.32--to an average of C--2.27) because the grading function is restricted to the course director. Moreover, the course design enables us to standardize the public speaking experience to such an extent that student performances have evidenced a qualitative increase both in form and substance. This is possible, largely because each TA is selected upon the basis of having been a superior student in the course during prior semesters. Apparently, this suggests that there will be an ongoing snowball effect for the course in which the quality of the teaching assistants will continually improve as the "cream of the crop" is constantly recycled back

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into the course as instructional assistants. Or, stated another way, there is an advantage to be found in the fact that we do not constantly return to ground zero every year simply because a new group of master's candidates have moved in to fill the slots vacated by the veteran teachers who are graduating.

The primary disadvantage to be found in this program lies in the ethical restrictions imposed upon the undergraduate TA. Specifically, since undergraduate students cannot be allowed to directly grade their classmates, learning activities must be designed in such a way as to assure that the influence of the TA upon a student's grade is kept to a minimum. In our system, this translates to the fact that we only have the TA directly involved with graded activities during the public speeches. For both the informative and persuasive speech activities, their obligation is simply to participate--along with the other members of the breakdown group--in the rank-ordering of speeches. In other words, all students in each breakdown section rank-order the speeches on a given day. The TA combines the ranked speeches from the three days of speaking into a single rank-ordered continuum and submits the resulting stack of typed speech-analysis/feedback materials to the Course Director. Only the Course Director determines the final rank-ordering of student speeches and then assigns grades to the individual students.

Since this system keeps the Course Director removed from the actual presentation of speeches, it is necessary to tape record all speeches so that the student can have a record of their oral performance to serve as a basis for a change of grade appeal after the activity is completed. Thus far, however, the system works sufficiently well to assure that fewer than ten students avail themselves of the appeal procedure during a typical semester.

In sum, therefore, a decision to utilize undergraduate TA's to manage the breakdown groups in a large mass lecture basic course clearly enables us to increase the quality of our course but it limits the kinds of learning experiences that are included. Though our public speaking activities prove to be remarkably valuable, we must forgo other potentially valuable activities such as a graded small group discussion activity or some form of structured dyadic experience.

As indicated, there are three innovations which must be included in the system to make the use of Undergraduate TA's practicable: 1) a contiguous lecture/breakdown schedule; 2) a personalized text-syllabus-workbook publication; and 3) a "classroom apprenticeship" course to serve as a vehicle for giving the TA academic credit as a payment for their service to the course. Briefly, I will explain each of these innovations below:

1. Given a Monday-Wednesday-Friday schedule, the course requires that the administration allocate a lecture hall and breakdown rooms (one for every twenty students) to the course even though those resources will not be utilized all forty-eight days during the sixteen-week semester. By having either the lecture hall or the breakdown rooms available all three days of the week, the course director can plan a sequence of lectures and activities which correspond to the needs of the course. In other words, where a course designed around a "two-hour lecture . . . one hour laboratory" format ends up with the schedule dictating instruction, this system allows for a complete pattern of flexibility. Consequently, during the beginning of the course, we can emphasize lectures by having as many as three lecture sessions a week. When speeches are scheduled, on the other hand, the mass lecture hall may go unused for as long as a week and a half as the breakdown groups take over. For example, attached is a copy of the ASU Calendar of Events.

The six scheduled days for staff meetings are also indicated on that form.

2. At Arizona State University, the Tubbs and Moss textbook (Human Communication, 4th ed.) is supplemented by a 291-page book: Communication, Gorsuch-Scarisbrick Publishers, Dubuque, Iowa. The most important feature of this book lies in the way it treats public speaking. An absolutely rigid model of the expected informative and persuasive speech activity is developed for the student. Consequently, the student can prepare the written materials required for the experience without having to rely upon the personal expertise of the classroom instructor. Moreover, since a rigid model is imposed upon all students, it becomes possible for those students to be fairly graded by the Course Director as he or she makes reference to the written materials. (A copy of this book is available to colleagues upon request.)

3. A course must be designed so you can offer the undergraduate TA academic credit for their efforts. Without such an incentive you can hardly expect to recruit volunteers or to be in a position to expect that they will behave in a professional manner throughout the entire semester. At Arizona State University, we have a course entitled "Classroom Apprenticeship" (Comm 302) which allows the student to earn three hours of credit with a "Y" grade.

Though I have only offered an abbreviated description of Communication 100 at Arizona State University, I hope it is clear that I believe the system to be eminently successful. I encourage anyone who feels compelled to find a more economical, substantive, and successful way to run the basic course to seriously explore the possibility of a mass lecture/discussion format staffed by undergraduate TA's.

COMMUNICATION 100

Calendar of Events
Spring 1983

Reading Assignments	MONDAY	WEDNESDAY	FRIDAY
			14 Orientation
T & M 1 C 1	17 LECTURE 1a	19 Lecture 1b	21 *Group Introduction*
T & M 2 C 2	LECTURE 2a 24	LECTURE 2b 26	*Activity* 28
T & M 3 C 3	31 LECTURE 3a	February 2 *Activity*	4 LECTURE 3b
T & M 4 C 4	LECTURE 4 7	9 *Activity*	11 TEST ONE
T & M 5 C 5	LECTURE 5a 14	LECTURE 5b 16	18 *Activity*
T & M 6 C 6	~~21~~	LECTURE 6a 23	~~25~~ LECTURE 6b
T & M 7 C 7	LECTURE 7a 28	March 2 *Activity*	4 LECTURE 7b
T & M 8 C 8	7 LECTURE 8	9 TEST TWO	App. Paper DUE 11
T & M 9-10 C 9-10	21 LECTURE 9	23 *Activity*	~~25~~ LECTURE 10
T & M 11 C 11	LECTURE 11 28 -Model Speech-	*Activity* 30	April 1 *INTRO's*
	INFORMATIVE SPEECHES 4 *GROUP I*	6 *GROUP II*	8 *GROUP III*
T & M 12-13 C 13	11 LECTURE 12	13 *Activity*	~~15~~ LECTURE 13
C 12	18 *Activity*	20 PERSUASION LECTURE	LECT. 22 -Model Speech
	PERSUASIVE SPEECHES 25 *GROUP I*	27 *GROUP II*	29 *GROUP III*
	May 2 Course Review	4 Last LECTURE	

Final Exam, 40 points: Section A 12:40 Thursday May 12 10:00--11:50
Section B 1:40 Wednesday May 11 3:40--5:30